

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: October 29, 2002

Proponent: Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA); Utah Wilderness Coalition (UWC)

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Wolf Point Area**

Date(s) of Field Office Review: February 7, 2007

BLM Field Office(s) Affected: Vernal Field Office

EVALUATION

1. Was new information submitted by a member of the public for this area?

a. YES: ☐ NO: ☒

2. If new information was submitted, describe the submission. For example, did the submission include a map that identifies the specific boundaries of the area(s) in question; a narrative that describes the wilderness characteristics of the area and documents how that information differs from the information gathered and reviewed in prior BLM inventories; photographic documentation; etc?

- a. No new information has been submitted by a member of the public.

In 1979, the BLM Vernal Field Office completed the *BLM Horse Point Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-731)*. The Wolf Point review area is similar in size and extent to the area evaluated by this report. It was recommended that the area did not qualify for further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved February 21, 1979.

The Wolf Point review area was not reinventoried for inclusion in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The proponents submitted information for the *SUWA/UWC Wolf Point Proposed Wilderness Unit* to the BLM Vernal Field Office on October 29, 2002. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered during the 1979 initial inventory concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The boundaries of the proposal are similar to the *Wolf Point Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-731)*. The Vernal Field Office prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* dated November 22, 2002, that found that the review area may contain wilderness characteristics.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1979 *Horse Point Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-731)*; the October 2002 *SUWA/UWC Wolf Point Proposed Wilderness Unit*; and, the Vernal Field Office *Evaluation of New Information Report* of November 2002. In addition, the interdisciplinary team reviewed changes to the area since 2002 that could affect the presence or absence of wilderness characteristics.

This maintenance review does not include U.S. National Forest lands, U.S. National Park Service, State of Utah lands, or private lands. Only lands within the BLM Vernal Field Office planning boundaries were considered by the interdisciplinary team. The attached map shows the BLM Vernal Field Office's determination of which lands contain or do not contain wilderness characteristics for the review area.

3. As a result of interdisciplinary review of relevant information (which may include aerial photographs, state and county road information, road maintenance agreements, documentation from prior BLM inventories, field observations, maps, master title plats, evidence presented as new information by a proponent, etc.), do you conclude:
 - a. _____ The decision reached in previous BLM inventories that the area lacks wilderness is still valid.
 - (or)
 - b. X Some or all of the area has wilderness characteristics as shown on the attached map.
4. Describe your findings regarding specific wilderness characteristics and provide detailed rationale.
 - a. **WIA Area.**
 - (1). **Description:** No WIA area present.
 - b. **Externally Nominated Area.**
 - (1). **Description:** The Wolf Point Area is about 70 air miles south-southwest of Vernal, Utah. The area is bordered by the Bull Canyon Road on the east; the V Canyon Road to the south; and, Tribal lands as well as Willow Creek to the west. The UWC proposal lies entirely within Uintah County.

The terrain of the area changes from south to north. In the south, the review area consists of wide, flat-topped ridges and open canyons. The canyon walls have gently sloping terraces alternating with steep, cliff-forming rock outcrops. In the north, the ridges are narrower. The canyons also are narrow with steep canyon walls.

Vegetation in the review area consists of piñon-juniper woodlands interspersed with bunch grasses, sage brush, and rabbit brush, isolated stands of aspen and fir, and patches of oak brush and mountain mahogany. Some canyon bottoms, particularly in the southern part of the review area may contain areas of riparian vegetative habitat.

About 7,999 acres or 55% of the Wolf Point review area has been leased for oil and gas exploration and development. A portion of the area also is identified as a special tar sand area.

The area has been inventoried for archeology in the last 2-3 years in conjunction with a seismic project.

The area as displayed on the attached map is split into 3 parcels. Parcel #1 consists of the BLM administered lands in T14S, R21E and Sections 3-15, 17-22 in the northern portion of the Wolf Point review area.

Parcel #2 is composed of the BLM administered lands in Sections 19 and 30, T15S, R21E., that are south of the Winter Ridge pipeline Right-Of-Way (R/W).

Parcel #3 consists of the BLM administered lands in Sections 19-21, 28-30, T15S, R21E, that are south of the Winter Ridge pipeline R/W.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** In Parcel #1, human intrusions are substantially unnoticeable. The piñon-juniper woodlands, the deep canyons and the more rugged, narrow ridges screen most intrusions from sight within the area. Parcel #1 has retained its natural character.

Approximately 3.25 miles of roads leading to wells and an airstrip have been cherry-stemmed.

In 2005, a 40 acre hazardous fuel reduction, lop-and-drop project was conducted in Parcel #1. Invasive juniper trees were cut off at ground level to prevent encroachment into the sagebrush habitat. About 30 to 40 trunks (stems) per acre were cut. The stems were four to eight feet tall with a two to six inch diameter. Evidence of cutting is not visible to the casual visitor. Some short term loss of wilderness character will occur for about one to three years as limbs with needles first brown and then fall off. The impact to naturalness is not substantially noticeable.

New impacts have occurred in Parcels #2 and #3 since 2002. The R/W for the Winter Ridge buried pipeline has been approved for a 100-foot wide construction route. Construction has started on the pipeline and is progressing from west to east. The pipeline route forms the northern boundary for the two parcels. The route is substantially noticeable. Parcels #2 and #3 are each less than 5,000 acres in size. Other oil and gas activities on existing leases have diminished the appearance of naturalness in portions of the two parcels. The interdisciplinary team found that Parcels #2 and #3 do not contain wilderness characteristics due to the impact of oil and gas activities on the natural character of the parcels and that each parcel is less than 5,000 acres in size.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The size, configuration, scenic vistas, and diversity of vegetation and landform provide a visitor with opportunities for solitude and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in Parcel #1. Most of Parcel #1 is remote. Over 50% of the area is comprised of canyons, and portions are accessible only by foot or horseback. Parcel #1 is contiguous to the Winter Ridge WSA. The review area and the adjacent WSA comprise a large, remote area where visitors are isolated.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The area contains cultural resources and scenic values. In addition to being home to the Winter Ridge wild horse herd area, the review area provides habitat for big game including elk, deer, and mountain lion. The review area contains habitat for sensitive species such as burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, osprey, sage grouse, Lewis' woodpecker, ringtail cat, dwarf shrew, Townsend's big-eared bat, Virgin River montane vole, and the Utah milk snake.

(5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The interdisciplinary team has found that Parcels #2 and #3 do not contain wilderness characteristics. In Parcels #2 and #3, new impacts have occurred since 2002. The two parcels are separated from Parcel #1 by the Winter Ridge pipeline route that is substantially noticeable. The isolated parcels are both less than 5,000 acres in size. In addition since 2002, the Vernal Field Office has identified oil and gas activities on portions of the parcels which have diminished the appearance of naturalness. These activities were conducted under valid, existing rights. These areas that are lacking in naturalness now isolate other portions of land within the review area.

- b. As protocol for all VFO wilderness characteristic reviews, the Interdisciplinary Team determined appropriate set-back distances for pipelines, roads, and other R-O-Ws.
- c. The following table summarizes the Non-WSA lands in the review area that do or do not contain wilderness characteristics:

WOLF POINT AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	11,802	2,764	14,566
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	11,802	2,764	14,566

- 5. Document all information considered during the interdisciplinary team review (e.g. aerial photographs, state and county road information, road maintenance agreements, prior documentation from the BLM inventories, field observations, maps, master title plats, evidence presented as new information by a proponent, etc.)
 - August 2006 NAIP (National Agricultural Imagery Program) aerial photos.
 - Master Title Plats.
 - State of Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining (UDOGM) approved, producing and plugged and abandoned oil and gas wells (current up to 1-25-07).
 - R-O-W using LR 2000.
 - Field Observations.
 - GIS layers for various resources including: Range improvements, Recreation facilities, Wildlife, and Fire including both Rx and fuels projects.
 - USGS digital topographic maps both 1:24,000 and 1:100,000.
 - Land status of the BLM.
 - The BLM road layer including roads on 1:24,000 scale and supplemented by both GPS and aerial photography.
 - Uintah County Roads layer August 2006.
 - UWC wilderness proposal data layer.

6. List the members of the interdisciplinary team and resource specialties represented.

<i>Chuck Patterson</i>	<i>Recreation</i>
<i>Kim Bartel</i>	<i>Recreation/wilderness</i>
<i>Tim Faircloth</i>	<i>Wildlife</i>
<i>Naomi Hatch</i>	<i>Realty</i>
<i>Jerry Kenczka</i>	<i>AFM Minerals</i>
<i>Howard Cleavinger</i>	<i>Associate Field Manager</i>
<i>Kyle Smith</i>	<i>GIS</i>
<i>Steve Knox</i>	<i>USO Planning Specialist</i>
<i>Kelly Buckner</i>	<i>NEPA</i>
<i>Mark Stavropoulos</i>	<i>Range</i>
<i>Blaine Phillips</i>	<i>Archeology</i>

7. Signature / Concurrence

This review by a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team was conducted in February 2007. The purpose of the review was to identify for planning purposes those areas that are not Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) but do contain wilderness characteristics. A supplement to the draft Vernal Land Use Plan will, in Alternative E, analyze the impact from and to the identified wilderness characteristics. Until the Land Use Plan is completed, it should be noted that as part of a project-specific or site-specific analysis within this area, these findings will be used to assess impacts, if any, to wilderness characteristics within the project area.

I concur with the findings of the interdisciplinary team as described in this review.

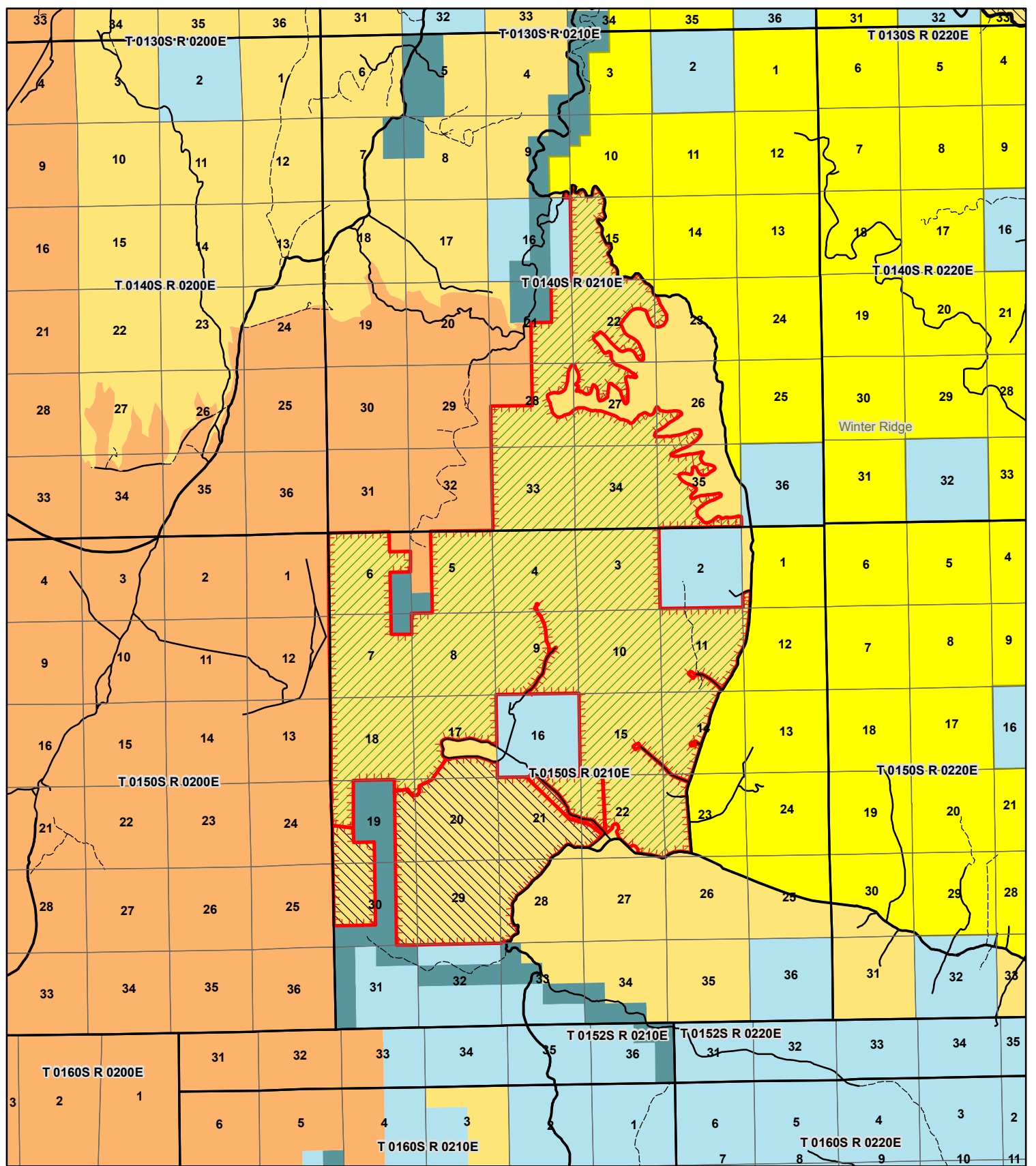
Name: _____

William H. Hargis
Field Office Manager

Date: _____

4/25/07

This determination is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision-making process and does not constitute a decision that can be appealed.



Field Office Decision for Wolf Point

Wilderness Characteristics Exist: 11,802 Acres
Wilderness Characteristics Do Not Exist: 2,764 Acres

U. S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Vernal Field Office, Utah
April 2007

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management
for use of any of the data for purposes not intended by BLM.

Wilderness Inventory Lands

- Review Area
- Wilderness Characteristics Exist
- Wilderness Characteristics Do Not Exist
- Wilderness Study Area

Land Status

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Indian Trust
- State
- State Wildlife Reserve/Management Area



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

